

Some things you could do

Share this leaflet with others — hopefully it will spark off interesting conversations.

Challenge assumptions about sex— your own and others'. Try not to make knee-jerk reactions, deciding that something is completely right or completely wrong.

Find ways of helping yourself **feel sexy** without buying into what advertisers try to sell you. It might be fun to play with your appearance.

Try taking emotional risks— being honest about our fears and desires is frightening. But the more we do it, the more we learn that we are not alone. Few people really feel as confident as they act!

If you are feeling anxious about sex or anything else, really, **find someone to talk to** about it. Telephone helplines can be good if you feel uncomfortable talking with someone you know.

Try not to judge other people for their consensual sexual desires, fantasies, behaviours or relationships.

When talking with current or prospective sexual partners, remember to **respect their needs and desires**.

Support open discussion about sexuality, whether it's in schools, in homes, at work or out with your friends.

Ask questions. You can learn a lot that way.

We are encouraged to ask ourselves

'Am I normal?'

Have you had too few partners?

Or too many?

Do you act gay?

Or not gay enough?

Do you masturbate enough?

Or maybe too much?

Do you use the best positions?

Have you got the right techniques?

Is your body the right size and shape?

Are your clothes and hair fashionable?

But there are better questions!

Do you respect other people?

Are your needs and desires satisfied?

Are you comfortable talking about sex?

Are you happy?

Intercourse is a non-profit, participatory organisation devoted to encouraging people to develop comfortable and positive ways of thinking and talking about sex and sexuality

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For other Intercourse leaflets, please send stamps. Donations (and feedback) are always welcome!

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Are you normal? (sexually speaking)

This leaflet is about the damaging idea that there is some way to be 'normal' when it comes to sex — and what you can do about it.

The idea of ‘normal sex’

An awful lot of us spend an awful lot of time worrying about sex. We worry about what kind of sex we are having (or not having). We even worry about what kind of sex other people are having (or not having). All this worrying sometimes leads to telling other people what kinds of sex they should have or shouldn't have. Even more shocking, some people take advantage of our anxieties about sex to sell us things. But we can change that.

Sex Sells

Corporations absolutely love the fact that we are all so hung up about sex. They sell us images of ‘desirable’ people that most of us will never look like (even if we could airbrush ourselves). This encourages us to buy everything from soft drinks and magazines to cars and holidays. At the same time, it makes us so insecure about our own desirability that we spend even more money on things like clothes and cosmetics, self-help books and sex advice columns, diets and plastic surgery. This vicious cycle means that corporations make more and more profits and we all feel more and more insecure and dissatisfied. Neat trick, eh?

At the same time, advertising and mass media shape our ideas of what is sexy and what sex should be. The media doesn't give us what we want. It creates images and then convinces us to want them. At the same time, we are told that sex is natural — it just happens. How realistic is that?

Fortunately, **we have choices**. We can work with other people to change this. We can decide for ourselves what is ‘sexy.’ We can share our experiences of what sex is really like. And how we would like it to be! We can create alternatives so that **sex is for people, not for profit**.

It's a Sin

We don't have to fit sex into traditional moralities. Instead we can focus on **respect, consideration, pleasure** and **communication**. We can think for ourselves. We can also change how other people think about sex by practising talking more openly and comfortably. We don't have to accept life the way it is — we have the power to change!

Words like *sinful*, *immoral*, *abnormal* and *unnatural* get thrown around a lot by people who are uncomfortable with sex. But who decides? The thing is, there is no truth about sex. Priests, politicians, psychiatrists and parents may like to think that they know what is right and what is wrong when it comes to sex. Maybe it makes them feel better about their own sexual anxieties. Unfortunately, this leads to other people feeling anxious as well.

Like any other aspects of life, sexuality is incredibly complex. Sexual fantasies, relationships and behaviours vary dramatically across cultures and even among individuals in the same culture. Even in the same culture, different people can't even agree on what counts as ‘sex’ and what doesn't!

We don't have to accept the ‘truth about sex’ that we get from magazines, religion or friends. What we can do is educate ourselves and talk to each other. We can develop the self-respect and confidence to ask for what we want and to say no to what we don't want. We can improve our communication with sexual partners to make sure that everyone is happy with what they are doing. We can educate ourselves about our bodies and how to keep ourselves healthy.

We can also develop good relationships with other people. It is often helpful to talk to people we trust and listen to their thoughts. Talking to other people as equals and making our own choices makes us feel better about ourselves than if we feel like we have no choice. And if we feel better about ourselves, we **take more pleasure in life**.

Pleasure is good for you

Talking Sex

Because our society is so uncomfortable with sex, we spend a lot of time of thinking and talking about it. Unfortunately, most of this talk covers up our anxieties rather than dealing with them. We make jokes and act out roles – homophobic lad, sex expert, prude, etc — to hide from our fears. This means an awful lot of talking and very little communicating. If we ever want to be comfortable with sex ourselves, and if we want to live in a society where sex is just a nice part of life instead of a big scary thing, we need to practise talking about sex in different ways.

Slags and Studs

Women who have sex with ‘a lot’ of people get called slag or slut. Men who have sex with ‘a lot’ of people get called stud or a real man. And those who don't seem interested in sex with other people are considered ‘abnormal’, too. We could be more concerned about things like communication, respect and safer sex than the ‘correct’ number of partners.

Sexual Disorientation

Supposedly people can be put into three boxes, depending on whether they fancy women, men or both. While this is a popular idea, it seems to cause an awful lot of suffering. People worry a lot about their image, trying very hard to make sure that others realise ‘what’ they are. At the same time, we worry about ‘what’ other people are — are they like me or are they different? (Aren't we all different?) Even worse, some people are so unhappy and anxious about these ‘differences’ that they attack others, either physically or verbally. Even people who call themselves ‘straight’ get attacked. Finally, people suffer when they desire others of the ‘wrong’ sex, or if they are worried that others will think they do. This idea of ‘sexual orientation’ leads to so much suffering over something that really should be very ice. Maybe we should get rid of it and just enjoy ourselves . . .